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# Economic Nationalism and the Cultural Politics of Consumption in Austerity Contexts: The Rise of Ethnocentric Consumption in Greece

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## Abstract:

By nuancing the politics of consumption in the context of austerity, this paper highlights the rise of economic nationalism and the reconfiguration of consumer cultures at the aftermath of the global financial crisis. As it argues, in the context of Greece, three types of consumer cultures have manifested evoking consumption as resilience, resistance, or reinforcement. This work focuses on the later which is discussed as ethnocentric consumption, which is part and parcel of economic nationalism. This is demonstrable in the inception and constitution of nation states, but also in times of crisis. Economic nationalism can be currently located in promotion of ethnocentric consumption. This paper critically appraises the phenomenon which is evident in the promotion of consumption based on ethnocentric criteria (natural resources, ownership, production, manufacturing, distribution and labour force). In the context of the Greek crisis, economic nationalism has become manifested as a solution to the national economy.

The specific case chosen is a citizens' movement and its campaign for the promotion of ethnocentric consumption. A close examination of the campaign (We Consume What We Produce) reveals the historical alignment of state's and citizens' economic interests, reverberation of state narrative from the 1980s, and exclusionary nationalism which is also used by fascists. Campaigns for ethnocentric consumption limit the creativity of consumer politics; firstly, this seems to be an alternative vehicle for political parties. Secondly, it is tied around a normative narrative of economic recovery, which is particularly mythological. Thirdly, its overall target is to maximise competitiveness on a global scale and, finally, it demonstrates a densely dangerous relationship with economic nationalism. Yet, it is important to situate this phenomenon within the contexts of economic cultures of austerity, especially as more creative modalities of social economy initiatives by grassroots groups have been re-socialising the market.

## Economic Nationalism Revisited: ‘Buy Greek’

"Here are some reasons why he could not find work in Greece: Yannis began his day by setting his alarm clock (made in Japan) at 6 o'clock in the morning... He made his coffee in a coffee pot (made in Turkey), shaved with his electric shaver (made in Germany), put on his shirt (made in Sri Lanka), his branded jeans (made in Singapore), his shoes (made in Italy). He ate some Gouda cheese from the Netherlands, Milner cheese from Germany, two Frankfurt sausages, tomatoes from Israel, two apples from Chile, and an orange from Spain. Then he took a look at his laptop (made in Mexico), checked his email while checking his watch (made in Taiwan). Next he locked the door (made in the USA), got in his car (made in France), and filled up the tank with petrol (from Saudi Arabia). At the end of yet another fruitless and frustrating effort to find work and after he printed some more copies of reference letters from a printer (made in Malaysia), Yannis decided to rest a bit. He put his slippers (made in Brazil) on, took a glass of wine (made in France) and turned on the TV (made in Indonesia). Then he was thinking why he could not find work in GREECE.<sup>1</sup>"

The above anecdotal story spread around the internet like wildfire promoting an old but recently rebranded campaign called ‘I insist on [buying] Greek’. The campaign was entitled *ο επιμένων ελληνικά*, based on the twist on an ancient Greek phrase which translates to s/he who insists wins. The twist is that the word ‘wins’ (*νικά*) becomes ‘Greek’ (*ελληνικά*) when a few more letters precede it, effectively making the campaign title translate to ‘Insist on Greek’. The motto of the movement is ‘I dress Greek, I eat Greek, I do Greek tourism’. Through this rhetorical word play the idea that the national market is a central tenant to the construction of national citizens is constructed. This construction suggests that a functioning national economy, and, by extension, a nation, depends on the willingness and effort of its citizenry to engage in consumption of national products. In simpler words, the promotion of what I call ‘ethnocentric consumption’ is seen as an exodus from the crisis. This paper explores this phenomenon and its ramifications for civic culture. It begins by contextualising this within different economic cultures of consumption which have emerged since 2008 and differentiates them in terms of their communication and targets: some consumer cultures focus on resilience, some focus on resistance and some encourage reinforcement of the state and its austerity policies. It questions the relationship between nationalism and consumption in Eurozone countries which have been adopting austerity policies and attempts to conceptualise ethnocentric consumption, as well as problematise the phenomenon in this context. Essentially, this work examines a specific modality of the politics of consumption within a particular geographical, social and political context; this modality concerns the phenomenon which I discuss here as ethnocentric consumption in the Greek context.

This idea of ethnocentric consumption is as old as nations themselves; in charting the relationship between nationalism and capitalism, Liah Greenfeld (2001) identifies the emergence of economic nationalism in England during the early days of the nation and nationalism. The author charts the forging of economically active – trading or commercial class – interests with the interests of the nation, which came to be regarded as the national interest. Economic nationalism has been analysed historically, as a nation-building project where nations have been attempting to connect political citizenship to economic citizenship –

i.e. be a good citizen, buy American/ Chinese products (cf. Frank, 1999; Gerth, 2003). The same rhetoric reverberates in the case of Greece, as indicated in the quote above. However, the difference in this case is that here there is no construction of the Greek citizen through the market, but a reprimanding of her; the aftermath of this mythology is that the Greek citizen should have behaved properly by supporting the Greek economy since the construction of its modern state. Therefore, the argument goes, they have no one to blame but themselves for the highest overall unemployment rate in the Eurozone, which officially rose at 25,8% at the end of 2014 (Eurostat, 2015). There is a predicament in this story, as it lacks a convincing interpretation of the cultural politics of consumption. In other words, it ignores the resourceful ways in which citizens have used their purchasing power to oppose or show support to particular causes. Meanwhile, the story of ethnocentric consumption runs on the assumption that a good citizen is an economic citizen, or rather a citizen that consumes the products of their nation, attributing to this exchange a specific normative -and highly ethnocentric- nature.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the market has become an arena in which citizens increasingly turn to in order to communicate causes and undertake civic actions. Such practices have been conceptualised as political consumerism (cf. Micheletti, 2003; Micheletti et al, 2004; Stolle et al, 2005; McFarland, 2010). Globalisation and the disassociation with traditional forms of political life are the backbone of political consumerism which, in terms of consumer cultures, comes in the binary form of boycotts (selective abstinence from purchases) and 'buycotts' (selective preference of purchases). The majority of literature on political consumerism has tended to focus on North American and Northern Europe (cf. Strømsnes, 2009; Neilson and Paxton, 2010; Ward and de Vreese, 2011; Lekakis, 2013b). Yet, in the regions of North Africa, South East Europe, and Western Asia, the question of the decline of political legitimacy and the concurrent rise of market legitimacy deserves further exploration. Literature on political consumerism allows us to track the problematic narrative of economic crisis as opportunity (buy Greek=save the economy). This paper attempts to further contribute to this body of knowledge with respect to the rise of ethnocentric consumption. It brings new insights into the understanding of the mediation of the relationship between nationalism and consumption in a less-theorised Eurozone country. Through original case study evidence from Greece, this paper demonstrates how, as a response to the crisis, political consumerism can unravel broader shifts in the civic culture of nations.

This paper, therefore, illuminates elements which have not been explored in terms of the cultural politics of consumption. It questions ethnocentric consumption through the case study of the citizens' movement 'We Consume What We Produce' (or 'I Prefer Greek')<sup>ii</sup>, a nation-wide campaign to promote a particular form of positive political consumerism. This is a manifestation of a particular culture of consumption under austerity which is concerned by the promotion of ethnocentric criteria such as national ownership, property and manufacturing and labour force. This paper highlights the ways in which contemporary nations under austerity attempt to promote consumer cultures which push for changes in economic organisation and activity. There is a contentious relationship between the push factor of political consumerism which aims to advance public perceptions and behaviours towards ethical concerns around the economy and the pull factor of capitalism which aims to co-opt frames of social justice (Micheletti and Stolle, 2008). Yet, what appears to be the case here is that the specific phenomenon of ethnocentric consumption is more prone to the pull factor of capitalism. Ethnocentric consumption has been examined as Country-Of-Origin (COO) effects on consumer purchasing in the business literature. COO research evaluates the effects of the weaving of the concept of the nation across various marketing and advertising

activities. Yet, this approach does not engage with the politics of consumption. The factoring of nationalism in global consumer culture can be identified in many different ways. Political consumerism has proven a much stronger term in understanding the variance of reasoning, organization and action enveloped in global consumer culture. Yet, research on political consumerism has also been overly concerned with the question of whether it constitutes a form of participation. I have elsewhere discussed this as the demonstration of a liquid politics in Bauman's terminology, addressing the opportunities and shortcomings it poses to an ever transient global political scene in crisis (Lekakis, 2013a). Hence, this work engages with the conceptual toolkit of economic nationalism, political consumerism, globalisation and austerity as an effect of the global financial crisis.

This paper argues that there is nothing creative about political consumerism as ethnocentric consumption; firstly, it seems to be an alternative vehicle for political parties. Secondly, it is tied around a normative narrative of economic recovery, which is particularly mythological. Thirdly, its overall target is maximizing competitiveness on a global scale and, finally, it demonstrates a close and dangerous relationship with economic nationalism. It is most important to remember that while the promotion of ethnocentric consumption fosters a consumer culture that is blinkered to the structural roots of injustice, it is not the only consumer culture that arose during Greek austerity. The following section reconsiders the various economic cultures which arise in the context of austerity.

### **Political Consumerism and Austerity in the Eurozone: Resilience, Resistance or Reinforcement?**

While the task of historically charting consumer culture in Greece is complex and by no means strict and solid, but rather the historical accumulation of patterns that were co-constructed, it is possible to distinguish three stages in Greek consumer culture. Since the end of the junta until the early 2010s and the intensification of austerity, three periods can be identified: a) institution of Greek democracy and construction of economy in national and regional terms, b) entry to Eurozone and homogenisation of currency and c) global financial crisis, Eurozone crisis and increased recession of the Greek economy. First, one can encounter a period from the end of the junta (1974) and the entry of the country in the European Union (1981) to the late 1990s. This is often regarded as the golden age, though it has been imagined and constructed on the basis of continuing debt and attempts to nationalise consumer culture were continuously followed by turbulence. Second, this task of nation building in economic terms, though already laden with debt and data fabrication, produced a popular consumer culture which was further magnified by the entry of the country in the European Union and later in the Eurozone. The co-construction of Greek consumer culture as national, but also European, deserves further interrogation in terms of the cultural politics of consumption, as well as identity politics. Thirdly, the Eurozone crisis fuelled a consumer politics of contention, as discussed below. After this and the austerity policies which followed, Greek consumer spending decreased dramatically, as Eurostat data for consumer expenditure demonstrate (Eurostat, 2013). Yet, as consumer spending declines, consumer politics seem to rise. While political consumerism had not been a discernible characteristic of

Southern European consumer cultures (Yates, 2011), austerity appears to have stirred the cultural politics of consumption in the region.

Austerity is a concept which can be traced in the historical charting of economic hardship (cf. Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 2000; Sissons and French, 2007) and the rhetoric which has emerged to describe the condition of austerity policies such as privatisation and international loans as an aftermath of the global financial crisis of 2008 (cf. Blyth, 2013). It has caused the depression of the economy and has caused a series of social crises by exercising economic pressure on its citizens through a series of 'Economic Adjustment Programmes' orchestrated what was previously regarded as the Troika (International Monetary Fund, European Central Bank and European Commission). As Sotiris (2013: n.p.n.) points out:

"The political representations and forms of political loyalty formed in the post-1974 period are being rapidly disbanded. The electoral earthquake of May 2012, when the mainstream parties could not form even a coalition government; the rise in protest votes; the collapse of the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK); the great losses of the Centre-Right New Democracy; the rise of the Left and the coalition party SYRIZA; and the emergence of the far-Right Golden Dawn as a national political force: all these attest to the extent and depth of a political crisis that is very close to becoming a hegemonic crisis, in the sense of an inability of the political system to extract some form of consent and legitimacy from larger segments of society and the consequent political instability."

Arguably, political culture has been in flux in Greece and the dire consequences of austerity have been visible, but neither coherent nor easily redeemable. Yet, as will be discussed later, ethnocentric consumption argues to be providing the telos of the crisis, or rather a mythological way out.

The narratives of the crisis and its aftermath vary. In their valuable study on the economic cultures of the crisis, Castells, Caraça and Cardoso (2012: 4) argue that:

"the Eurozone is being shaken by the inability of the governments to act together, as Germany uses its economic clout to push forward a tighter fiscal union that would sharply reduce national sovereignty in most European countries. Social protests are mounting, populist movements have erupted in the political scene, and the culture of defensive individualism fuels xenophobia, racism, and widespread hostility, breaking down the social fabric and increasing the distance between governments and their citizens. The culture of fear rises alongside the embryos of alternative cultures of hope".

It is this fear-hope binary that this paper aims to further problematise. In the context of austerity, particular cultures of consumption emerge, ranging from the bottom to the top of economic organization.

A hopeful offshoot of crisis has included significant documentations of modes of resilience based on social organization such as co-operatives, social groceries and barter markets, ranging from direct trade networks and solidarity purchase groups to social groceries and pharmacies. Such modes of degrowth have demonstrated the ways in which the economic sphere has been creatively reclaimed (D'Alisa, Demaria and Kallis, 2014). Similarly inspiring has been the rise of Solidarity Purchase Groups (SPGs) where collective

action manifests as creative organisation through formations such as Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale (Graziano and Forno, 2012; Grasseni, 2013). In Greece, SPGs have been mushrooming since 2008 (Nasioulas, 2012). There are comprehensive platforms mapping what can broadly be referred to as Social Economy initiatives. Enallaktikos.gr, for example, is run by a volunteer group who have mapped about 3,000 official or unofficial groups and organisations across Greece, ranging from alternative/ solidarity networks and free distribution/ exchange networks, direct trade networks, cooperative groups, social groceries, as well as time banks and other forms of participation in a social economy. Moreover, in 2013, Omikron Project –a volunteer group who, in their own words, are "aiming to show the world the untold side of Greece's crisis, and crash the negative stereotypes of the country"– published a list of grassroots groups, including neighbourhood assemblies, media outlets, health volunteer moments, environmental networks, human rights solidarity networks, collective kitchens, and alternative economies and local exchange trading systems<sup>iii</sup>. The existence and operation of a polymorphous alternative economy which has manifested at the backlash of the crisis calls for further exploration of the spaces, stories and possibilities of solidarity in everyday consumption. This is an economic culture of resilience. Yet, this also calls for careful consideration of the polymorphous consumer cultures emerging alongside it.

Yet, SPGs do not present the only way in which economic cultures, especially cultures of consumption, transform due to the economic crisis. Austerity cultures of consumption also include more expected manifestations of political consumerism such as boycotts. One, in particular, called for a boycott of a Greek company in Manolada which hired gunmen to intimidate, leading to the injuring of at least twenty-nine employers of immigrant origin. This tragedy took place at the company's strawberry picking farm, following a claim by the workers who had not been paid for their labour. This has been a permanent campaign since April 2013<sup>iv</sup>. Another boycott call reflects resistance to some European national products (as a protest of resistance to Troika-imposed austerity policies) with one major supermarket running a permanent campaign against German and Dutch products. Another type of resistance through consumption is evident in the heterogeneous and agonistic space of the Exarcheia neighbourhood in Athens (Chatzidakis et al, 2012). Such examples belong to an economic culture of resistance, even if demonstrating different political and social rationales. What is common between economic cultures of resilience and those of resistance is that they call for collective action, either by forming networks to conduct alternative forms of trade based on collectivism or exchange economy, by promoting information pertaining to the contention raised around a company and its practices, or by rejecting corporate consumer cultures and neoliberal regrowth.

Typical forms of political consumerism take place alongside these, ranging from degrowth initiatives, boycotts and ethnocentric 'buycotts'. The latter belong to an economic culture of reinforcement. Ethnocentric consumption rose in response to the crisis and is part and parcel of political consumerism, as it addresses the pursuit of a political goal through the economic sphere. In particular, ethnocentric consumption is a phenomenon which manifests in austerity cultures. Similar initiatives can be loosely identified in the other so-called PIIGS (Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece, and Spain) countries. Ethnocentric consumption promotes and denotes the preference of consumption of commodities of national production (cf. Breton, 1964; Frank, 1999; D'Costa, 2009; Meuleman et al, 2012). Ethnocentric consumption is closely linked to the phenomenon of economic nationalism and should thus also be examined in this light. Some of the initiatives promoting ethnocentric consumption in the Greek economic sphere include 'Buying Greek', 'Supporting Greek', 'Made in Greece' and 'Insist on Greek'.

An example of a campaign promoting ethnocentric consumption is the case of the Greek citizens' movement 'we consume what we produce' (or 'I Prefer Greek'). It is an initiative founded by about one hundred people who were based in local government, higher education institutions, technical associations and chambers, the scientific and art community, as well as the press and other media, or were lawyers, doctors, heads of trade unions in the public and private sector, as well as chairs of commercial and professional chambers, federations and associations of commerce and the market. The campaign was legally formed as a 'non-profit company' according to Civic code. Its main claim is that by 'consuming what we are producing' the Greek consuming population can ensure that the money they are spending stays within the Greek economy and thus supports Greek companies which, in turn, preserve employment and foster a vibrant economy. The campaign gained publicity and attracted new members in October 2010, a few months after the passing of the first Memorandum imposed by the Troika. The expansion of this initiative is concerned with opening up branches in cities around the country for the cause of ethnocentric (pro-Greek) political consumerism to be promoted across the media. In order to critically evaluate ethnocentric consumption in light of the present state of Greek civic culture, the next section explores the phenomenon through the prism of economic nationalism.

### **Economic Nationalism, Ressentiment and Ethnicity: 'We Consume What We Produce'**

Economic nationalism goes back to the institution of nation states, as the historical roots of the market can be traced in the constitution of states. Nationalism has been constructed as the cohesive glue of societies under states in a ways which had always been interwoven with the economic outlook of elites. According to Greenfeld (2001: 33-34):

"Economic nationalism emerged in England as early as nationalism in general: it was, to begin with, a refraction of national consciousness in the consciousness of particular -economically active- strata. It would be wrong to say that members of these strata perceived nationalism as instrumental to their (given, economic) interests. Rather, superadded onto their occupational and estate identities, national identity changed the nature of these other identities, changed the meaning -and potential importance- of belonging to these strata (transforming their "class" consciousness and the very nature of the "trading" or "commercial class"), and thus necessitated the formation of new interests, which were perceived at once as the interests of these economically active strata and as national interest".

Economic nationalism is, thus, also constructed as reflecting the behaviours a cohesive body of citizens who are operating as economic subjects in all fields of economic activity and according to the interests of a national economy, whether that might refer to spending or saving. Since its inception, however, economic nationalism serves particular interests, admittedly those of the commercial classes. Such has been the echoing significance of the founding circumstances of contemporary nations. Ethnocentric consumption is a mode of reinforcement of the state. In particular, has tended to support the diachronic *modus operandi* of the Greek state since its establishment in 1974. This becomes apparent if we consider that the original campaign behind the 'we consume what we produce' movement can be located in



the 1980s and the introverted economic policies of the PASOK government. Economic cultures of austerity can, thus, reset public opinion of how consumption should operate, guiding it towards a normative narrative of 'buy national products for the regeneration of the economy'. In the context of the Eurozone, this has been made manifest in the reinvigoration of political consumerism as 'buycotting' the nation (selection products based on ethnocentric criteria). The state's and citizens' interests thus become conflated in the promotion of ethnocentric consumption.

Nations have sought to capture the hearts and minds of their citizens from the very beginning, as the economic construction of the nation-state is founded on the basis of its consumers (Crane, 1998; Gerth, 2011). The majority of literature on economic nationalism has been traditionally historical (Boehme, 2008; Schulze and Wolf, 2012). Furthermore, the study of this phenomenon has predominantly had a geographic focus on Asia (cf. Yoshino, 1999; Nelson, 2000; Gerth, 2003, 2012; Li, 2008; D'Costa, 2012) and to a lesser extent in the Middle East (Bernstein and Hasisi, 2008). Greenfeld (1992) has also demonstrated how some dynamics which influence the market and consumer cultures can be understood through the psychological state of 'ressentiment'. Ressentiment is a process by which elites and, following them, citizens construct negative attitudes towards a country, or perhaps even countries, or even possibly all countries except their own. Such a process begins with the idealisation of another country, continues with a process of comparison, and results in the realisation of inequality, as well as, potentially, extremities. As Greenfeld (1992: 16) writes, "wherever it existed, it fostered particularistic pride and xenophobia, providing emotional nourishment for the nascent national sentiment and sustaining it whenever it faltered". This is the case in a fascist reading of resentment, as is discussed later. Such works provide good ground to explore the interrelation between economy and culture as offered in historical understandings of nationalism. In this vein, economic nationalism can be translated as the state's attempt to draw public attention away from the crisis by returning to its original introverted rhetoric.



Figure 1

In fact, in the 1984 video which started the campaign of the case study at hand, a man is playfully sat in the waiting room of what looks like a public service building, basking in self-glory. "Am I not the coolest?" he asks the camera while he gets up and starts walking around, still talking to the camera [Figure 1]:

"My shoes are imported. Eleven thousand (drachmas). They rock! My shirt? This little jacket? Imported. Nine browns (slang for 1.000 drachma notes). I'm a true model, right? This cigarette? Imported! A puff costs a fiver. Pure Texas. Trousers of the latest fashion, imported as well! Free, just six thousand two hundred! Who am I? Am I imported too?"

As the man reaches closer to the office booth, he lowers his voice and coyly requests his unemployment benefits. The caption that follows reads: 'when buying imported goods, we all pay, because this is how we reinforce unemployment and inflation'. This can be understood as an example of resentment, in the sense that it portrays someone (the average Greek) who idealises imported products, but who cannot sustain their livelihood, to the extent that they must turn to their national market, in order to be supported. The message in the video is 'support the economy': buy Greek, though it might not be 'cool', but it is the rational choice. It does not directly exclude or demonise other nations, but instead steers the consumers into economic nationalism. This ad was part of a campaign organised by the Association of the Promotion of Greek Products (*Σύνδεσμος Προώθησης Ελληνικών Προϊόντων*). Three decades later, this video has been featuring in television channels, and the campaign is rebranded by the same types of people that initially supported it, coming from the arts and the

intelligentsia, but also, crucially, from politics and entrepreneurship. This makes Clift and Woll's argument more relevant, as after the credit crunch "long-buried measures reappeared in political toolkits" (2012: 307). Ethnocentric consumption is such a long-buried tool of economic nationalism.

In the 1960s, Harry Johnson (1965) outlined a theoretical model for understanding economic nationalism as a political phenomenon in which nationalism translates to economic policy, employing three applications of economic theory to demonstrate this. Firstly, he considered economic nationalism to be based on the economics of discrimination which produces nationalism as a sacrifice of material gain (i.e. willingness to pay higher prices to avoid contact with the Other) based on discriminating factors (Becker, 1957). Ethnicity is to be located at the heart of contemporary contentious politics. As a marker of difference, ethnicity is the encore of nation states. The relationship between ethnicity and nationalism is entangled. As Craig Calhoun (2007: 51) posits,

"While it is impossible to dissociate nationalism entirely from ethnicity, it is equally impossible to explain it simply as a continuation of ethnicity or a simple reflection of common history or language.... The possibility of a closer link to nationalism is seldom altogether absent from such ethnic claims, however, and the two sorts of categorical identities are often invoked in similar ways."

Secondly, Johnson views the phenomenon as concerned with the economisation of democratic governance, whereby which parties exercise political power by measuring partisanship and electoral participation through the application of economic theory (cf. Downs, 1957; Clift and Woll, 2012). Thirdly, he sees economic nationalism as based on the promotion of national ownership, property and manufacturing and labour force. In Johnson's model, discrimination is implicit, while economic approaches to democracy and nationalism are more explicit. Ethnocentric consumption can be a covert mode of economic nationalism, while the political and nationally-minded economic acts that favour or target the growth and development of the nation are overt modes of economic nationalism.

Ethnocentric consumption, as promoted by the citizens' movement 'We Consume What We Produce', is akin to economic capitalism in terms of all three perspectives discussed above. Firstly, it is based on an economics of discrimination. In an interview with the national newspaper 'Ethnos' (English: Nation), the second vice-president of the movement and chair of the General Confederation of Professionals, Craftsmen and Traders of Greece, Giorgos Kavvathas, declared:

"We do not prompt people to boycott foreign goods. We tell them to support the Greek products. Through the comparison of the qualitative characteristics and, naturally, in combination with the price, they will discover, for instance, why a Greek cheese is better than a German one, even though it might be more expensive... Our olive oil is the best in the whole world. Most of its quantities are being bought by Italians who then mix it with their own olive oil".

It is clear from this statement that the superiority of Greek products over other products is argued. As an economics of discrimination, ethnocentric consumption is addressing a virtual or "imagined nation" (Anderson, 1983) of Greek consumers, immediately excluding anyone who does not belong to that political (and, to a certain extent, racial) cohort.

Secondly, though not in a direct manner, the relationship between partisanship and economic nationalism is significant. ‘Buycotts’ of products based on ethnocentric criteria denote underlying support to the Greek state as the regulator of its economy. The links between local authorities and the citizens’ movement, as well as the welcoming reception from all older and newer Greek parties and the central idea of national economic sovereignty all testify to the consolidation of economic and political interests in the face of the crisis at home and abroad. The movement's relationship with the government of the time has been strong. In their website, the movement states that after seeking an audience from some of the main political parties (then: PASOK, New Democracy, Democratic Left), they had gained positive recognition. Meanwhile, political parties like the (then) opposition Syriza and the fascist Golden Dawn have not been directly linked to this cause. However, even these parties have supported (though in very different terms) the idea of boosting the national economy by supporting national production and have communicated the importance of ethnocentric consumption. This does not imply that there is an adherence to the horse-shoe theory, which has often been the rhetoric which mainstream media in Greece advocate: that is that the so-called far left (Syriza) and far right (or, rather, fascist) (Golden Dawn) parties are much more similar due to their extreme positioning in the political spectrum. On the contrary, this idea finds the author of this paper opposed to. Without siding with any particular partisan position, this paper problematises the gradations of nationalism which appear in everyday acts of consumption. For instance, the citizens’ movement were rejected an audience with Syriza, a fact which gives more credence to the suggestion that the campaign has been closely associated with the conservative New Democracy-Pasok coalition (2012-2015). This had sought to gain legitimacy from this normative cause, while reproducing a synergy between the political and the economic class. Moreover, the exclusion of an audience with Golden Dawn shows that while there has been a silencing of the potential commonalities that economic nationalism draws between the movement and this party. Yet, this does not mean that Golden Dawn do not engage in more racially and ethnically explicit propagation of economic nationalism. One of the darkest dangers of ethnocentric consumption is that it overplays an economic understanding of belonging to the nation, by exhibiting a fascist pro-Greek and anti-immigrant agenda through the marketplace.

Thirdly, ethnocentric consumption is a case of economic nationalism based on the promotion of national ownership, property and manufacturing and labour force. This is exactly what the citizens’ movement has been doing. We should question the gradations of nationalism embedded in this cause. Ethnocentric consumption has also been discussed as ‘patriotic consumption’ (cf. Balabanis et al, 2001; Μανιφάβα, 2012). For instance, patriotic consumption can find expression in the marketplace in the same way that fair trade does. In



many ways, the core idea of fair trade, a fair pay for a fair day's work is what seems to be missing from the Greek labour market, where privatisation has imploded exploitation through part-time and flexible contracts. So, patriotic consumption as a least exclusionary gradation of ethnocentric consumption aims to boost the national market and to create fair opportunities for all. This is an idealised form of consumption, urging citizen consumers to assume that they can impact on the state of the market, and that they are not alone in a matrix of crisis in a country where national debt is currently calculated at \$240.5 billion. On the darker side of the continuum,

Figure 2

fascism finds place to grow. In fact, Golden Dawn has been involved in the setting up of ‘solidarity’ initiatives such as food kitchens and social groceries for Greeks only<sup>vi</sup>. This type of ‘exclusive’ solidarity and economic discrimination goes to show that ethnocentric consumption might be more nuanced than patriotic consumption. We need to problematise the degree to which national markets have become a playing field for the gauging of support to the state through ethnocentric consumption.

As a final point, the communication strategies of the movement have been quite slow and stagnant. Its Facebook page<sup>vii</sup> was set up in 2013, and features 1,399 ‘likes’ to date. Furthermore, it does not seek to engage citizens in any type of ‘personalized action’ (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012), as campaigns related to identity politics often do. Instead, the message which appears to repeat itself across the website, Facebook group and other media outlets which the movement targets, is ‘I support our products, our jobs, our countries’ [Figure 2]. What appears to be happening is a shift to address companies, instead of consumers. This is evident through the recent revamping of their website, which operates more as a database and certification label of COO for Greek companies<sup>viii</sup>. Therefore, the target of ethnocentric consumption appears to be the engagement of companies with the cause, highlighting once again the close tie between the political and economic class in the promotion of economic nationalism. Initiatives such as this were in particular bloom in the period 2010-2012 and attempted to create an impression of the crisis as a deep cut in the economy, but not as an open wound, demarcated by austerity policies, widening social gaps and sending signs of humanitarian crisis.

## **Discussion: Ethnocentric Consumption between Political Consumerism and Economic Nationalism**

Ethnocentric consumption is a phenomenon linked to the promotion of selective consumption based on national criteria (national resources, national production, and national labour). I discuss this ethnocentric consumption, as it places the nation at the heart of its selection criteria, and because the nation is as evoked similarly to ethnicity (Calhoun, 2007). Ethnocentric consumption denotes responsibility-taking on behalf of citizen consumers operating individually, but imagining their actions as collective – a phenomenon which I have elsewhere discussed as collective individualism (cf. Lekakis, 2013b). In this respect, it can be likened to the theory of political consumerism. It is communicated as civic duty towards the national economy with the projected target being social cohesion and resumption to stability. Yet, it is unclear whether this type of political consumerism can be productive (i.e. create a civic consciousness in the minds of consumers which spans beyond the exclusionary connotations of economic nationalism) or destructive (i.e. create a polarisation between Greek-Other which can spread socially). This phenomenon deserves further interrogation vis-à-vis a comparative analysis of its manifestations in a global scale, as well as how it escapes the bounds of creative citizenship and might become a playing field for competition for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).

The rise of ethnocentric consumption signifies a turn to traditionalism and evokes memories of a newly-constituted state, evident in the use of promotional material from the original 1980s campaign brought forward by ‘We Consume What We Produce’. This phenomenon has been gaining ground across different European countries, in a variety of

different initiatives in the notoriously named PIIGS countries (Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Greece and Spain); examples include ‘Compras made in Spain’, ‘Compro o que é nosso’ in Portugal and the ‘Buy Irish’ campaign. The latter, in particular, was blocked by the European Court of Justice, as it was considered a hindrance to the free movement of goods, and “a clear attempt to reduce the flow of imports” (European Commission Report on Enterprise and Industry, 2010: 20). Such a response from the European Commission illustrates that the promotion of such consumer culture in times of crisis is flawed from the onset, as ethnocentric consumption clashes with the free marketplace. Even if it was more inclusive or orchestrated, it would still be nowhere near in influencing the recovery of state economies when free trade policies are still being implemented. Alternatives to ethnocentric consumption which stem from the same concerns include local markets, SPGs and direct trade initiatives. The difference between the first and its alternatives are to be found predominantly in the lack of engagement with the market as regulated or promoted by the state. Flourishing research which can positively impact on societies invites further explorations.

Ethnocentric consumption is part and parcel of the consumer cultures arising in the economic crisis, yet in many ways it is a regression to old tactics and an attempt to normalise a neoliberal political and economic order. It brings a series of paradoxa in light, such as the crisis of neoliberal politics and the persistence of market legitimacy. Also, ethnocentric consumption is quite paradoxical in the sense that while there is support to a narrative that suggests that buying Greek products might help cure the economy, austerity policies of privatisation and marketisation of public assets remain unquestioned. To return to the opening quote, there are many reasons as to why Yannis does not have a job, but it is almost certain that buying only Greek products as a response to the mounting unemployment might be no more than a drop in the ocean. There is very little relationship to be identified between this type of economic culture and the seeds of a social economy, evident for instance in the existence of Solidarity Purchase Groups, as well as seeds of resistance to neoliberal economy through targeted boycotts against the violation of human rights and the expansion of a global consumer culture. The latter, in particular, appear to be flourishing alongside aforementioned attempts to institutionalise economic nationalism, such as ethnocentric consumption.

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<sup>i</sup> Translated from <http://www.protimoellinika.gr> [12 March 2015].

<sup>ii</sup> <http://protimoellinika.gr/>

<sup>iii</sup> <http://omikronproject.gr/grassroots>

<sup>iv</sup> <http://stream.aljazeera.com/story/201304192316-0022690> [12 March 2015].

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<sup>vii</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/EllinikaEpimenon> [13 March 2015]

<sup>viii</sup> <http://www.epimenonellinika.gr> [13 March 2015]